# Overview of the study:

Gray (2002) aimed to investigate the emotion labor performed by Family Support Workers (FSWs) in Tower Hamlets, a borough in East London with high levels of poverty. Gray performed an ethnographic investigation that involved shadowing five 5 FSWs, interviewing families who used FSW services, and analyzing case records.

# Differences in gender, race, or other social identities that surfaced in the research:

FSWs often came from similar backgrounds as their clients, meaning they grew up in the Tower Hamlets and/or are a part of the same ethnic communities. Because Tower Hamlets has a high Bangladeshi population, many of the FSWs were Bangladeshi themselves. FSWs are also most often women, which is common in caring professions that are associated with “women’s work.”

**The challenges associated with this profession:**

FSWs work with families that are experiencing significant, and often traumatic, hardships, including domestic violence, extreme poverty, and chronic illness. FSWs are expected to collaborate with families to deliver services tailored to their needs and cultural beliefs. They must also maintain positive, friendly relationships with their clients so that they continue seeking support.

# How workers in this profession perform emotion labor in response to the challenge:

FSWs are expected to befriend their clients and maintain emotional relationships with them. This enables a level of trust and helps clients feel comfortable opening up about the issues occurring in their lives. Additionally, FSWs must be non-judgmental to prevent families from feeling stigmatized.

# The potential toll emotion labor can take on workers in this profession:

Because FSWs often come from the same communities as their clients, there is the danger of over-identification. Over-identification is the act of literally feeling someone else’s emotions so much that the individual loses perspective and cannot separate their own experiences from others.

# Strategies suggested:

It is important for FSWs to have debriefing sessions with a supervisor after meeting with their assigned families. This enables them to “off-load” any distressing emotions and prevent internalization. Additionally, they can communicate challenges with families in a safe space and brainstorm ways to address these problems in non-judgmental, non-stigmatizing ways.

# Discussion questions:

What challenges do workers in the profession detailed in this case study tend to face?

How do they perform emotion labor in response to that challenge?

What toll does emotion labor tend to have on employees in that profession?

What are the differences in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or other social identity markers that were identified within the case?

What strategies for coping for managing emotion labor were suggested by the case study authors?